

The Gulf of the Farallones and Cordell Bank National Marine Sanctuaries Boundary Modification and Protection Act

Purpose: To protect the rich biological life in the coastal waters and estuaries of Sonoma County, California. These marine environments support high levels of biological diversity exceeding the biological productivity of tropical rain forests.

While the coast just south of Bodega Head is protected by the Gulf of the Farallones and the Cordell Bank National Marine Sanctuaries, the rest of the biologically productive Sonoma Coast must be protected from oil spills and land-based pollution. Additionally, the Russian River and Gualala River estuaries along this stretch of coast need protection.

The bill would adjust the boundary of our two existing sanctuaries north and westward. The westward adjustment will take the sanctuaries out into deeper water making it more difficult to extract oil from the ocean floor. The northern adjustment for Cordell Bank will add an area called the Bodega Canyon, the vortex for much of the nutrient-rich upwelling along this coast. Moving the boundary of the Gulf of the Farallones northward would bring it up to the Gualala River, protecting the entire Sonoma Coast.

National Marine Sanctuaries are only designated in areas that have special biological significance. The Sonoma Coast is one of the most biologically productive regions in the world. It is within one of the five coastal upwelling zones on the planet which comprise only 1 percent of the ocean, but produce 20 percent of the world's fish. Nutrient-rich water rises from deeper levels to replace the surface water that has drifted away and these nutrients are responsible for supporting the large fish population found in this area. Additionally the coastal estuaries are important passages for endangered salmon and steelhead, essential haulouts for seals and sea lions, and prolific nurseries for hundreds of aquatic species.

This bill does not add any additional regulations to fishing. That will be left to the State of California, which has jurisdiction in state waters, and to the Pacific Fisheries Management Council, which already has federal jurisdiction.

By protecting the entire Sonoma County coast and estuaries, the bill will protect the Bodega Marine Laboratory investment in marine research, jobs that are dependent on a tourist economy, and sports fishing. And, because the bill will protect fish habitat, it will protect the livelihoods of commercial fishermen.